

MECAC January 23 & 24, 2008

Members: Connie Sturgis, Lynn Fawcett, Shelly Meyer, Carrie Leu, Cindy O'Dell, Shelly Fischer, Ann Tribby, Mary Jane Standaert, Susan Carlson, Doris Running Crane, Barb Perzinski, Sheilah Mevis, Libby Hancock, Dale Mahugh, Jeanette Hall, Terry Minow, Dan McCarthy, Stephanie Goetz

Guests: Jane Schumacher, Pat Knoepke, Bobbi Goff, Christy Hill Larson

Staff: Jamie Palagi, Chris Hettinger, Linda Kjørstad, Lisa Murphy, Angi Rayfield, Melody Olsen, Sally Mueller, Chauntel Lucier

Wednesday 1/23/08

Cindy O'Dell opened meeting with a welcome thanked everyone for braving the weather

Jamie Palagi updated the council on the nomination process and vacant positions. Additionally, she shared that licensing staff will attend portions of the meeting today due to other demands. She has received a nomination for the county commissioner seat and is still waiting on child welfare, low income and organized labor nominations. All other seats have been filled and we can anticipate their presence at the April meeting.

Council Overview

Cindy went over the MECAC Guiding principles (which can be found in the binder under organization) and described the consensus decision making process.

Budget Overview – Chris Hettinger

Chris passed around the budget status sheet with a 5 month expenditure out of a 12 month period and represents fiscal year 2007, 2008, and projected 2009. There are four basic categories which include subsidy/scholarship, administration, quality, and services support. The fifth column is for the MOST (Montana-Out of-School-Time) dollars.

Jamie stated that with the scholarship, subsidy line we know that the TANF caseload is increasing. When TANF goes up, use of childcare scholarship goes up also. We will be watching that trend. Jamie also shared that as we look to budgeting for 2009, there are some necessary costs that will need to be accounted for including a functional cost analysis for the Resource & Referral Agencies, roll out of infant/toddler early learning guidelines and also the Quality Rating Improvement System preparation. Barb Perzinski expanded a little on the TANF caseloads increasing. In the past, when someone has exited the TANF program, they have been eligible for the WSP (work support payment), which is going away July 1st. Post-employment services will be coming into effect. In essence, people will close their case, but the money they get will be disregarded, they will have the option to remain on TANF for three months, \$375 the first month, \$275

the second and \$175 the third. They also will be eligible for supportive services (i.e., car breakdown) and childcare.

Chris answered a question, “How do we manage to carry the funds forward?” The money that doesn’t get spent this year, we would like to use next year. The CCDF has a fund called the discretionary fund that allows the Bureau to obligate funds over a two year period and take the third year to spend it out. So we must have funds contracted by 2009.

The spending levels in 2008 become the base for the governor’s budget as it is presented for the budget for 2010 & 2011.

Jamie P said that one of the goals for this year is “New goals with old money” and this should be our target as we approach the EPP process. We will still ask for new money. ECSB will provide our EPP to Division Administrator who revises and passes to DPHHS Director who revises and sends on to Governor. Jamie shared initial thoughts for the EPP priorities. Final dollar amounts need to be completed by August.

ECCS/Headstart Collaboration Report – Mary Jane Standaert

Jan Lombardi, Policy Advisor in the Governor’s Office has asked Mary Jane to help Mrs. Schweitzer who wants to create a New Parent Kit. This new parent kit would provide information on child development, parenting, and state and local services for parents and children that they might need in the first few years. The plan is to design an 18 month calendar. Each page of the calendar would have a prevention message (i.e., child abuse, fatherhood, immunization, early intervention, newborn screenings, parenting tips, and child development information). Funding for this project has not yet been identified. The Montana Children’s Trust Fund and Healthy Mothers/Healthy Babies are collaborating on this project. School Readiness groups are ready and active throughout the state. The School Readiness Summit will be held May 21 & 22 in Helena.

Nominations/Elections

The council needs to have nominations for someone to be Vice Chair. This person should have a term that expires in 2010. A nomination committee was formed and recommendations will be made on day 2 of MECAC. Also, each committee (Public Policy, Quality and Program) need to elect new committee chairs in their small group meetings on Thursday.

Housekeeping items

Travel claims were passed out – Questions regarding travel should be addressed to Chris Hettinger or Renne’t Sarbu from the Early Childhood Services Bureau staff. Additionally, the evaluation forms from the September 2007 meeting were helpful and we intend to make this a standing part of the meeting process. Please fill out new evaluation forms for this meeting

ECSB Updates

Infant/Toddler Forums

In the spring meeting of 2007, Roy Kemp shared that he had been contacted by Representative Roy Brown regarding Infant/Toddler concerns. In June, Quality Assurance & ECSB sponsored a forum in Billings on this topic. Over 80 providers met to discuss issues with Infant/Toddler care. Subsequently, forums were held in Bozeman, Miles City and Helena. More than 100 providers participated in the forums. The forums were designed to encourage providers to identify challenges to providing infant and toddler care and to generate potential solutions. Many issues were identified, but there was no consensus regarding recommendations. Sally Mueller from ECSB and Stephanie Goetz from QAD are drafting a concept paper based on all the information that came out of the forums and taking into account what the council said in September. The paper will work to incorporate best practices for infant/toddlers, what the current practice in Montana is, and summarize input from the guidelines from Zero to Three and NAEYC. A draft of the concept paper should be ready by the end of January. Shelly Fischer went to the Helena forum and thanked everyone for doing it.

Economic Impact Study update

Jamie Palagi recently had a conference call with Jan Lombardi, Mike Halligan, and the National Economic Development and Law Center. The NEDLC has written their preliminary draft and Jamie, Jan and Mike are all looking at it. Plans are to do a formal roll-out of the study and to coincide with the School Readiness Follow-up Summit and the Workforce Development Statewide meeting in Billings. The tool is not being written for childcare providers but for business leaders, policy makers, and philanthropists. Next steps include identifying action steps and communication plans for how to use this study at the state and local level.

QRIS large group discussion

The goal for the afternoon is for QRIS work, the council will break into the same small groups from November's meeting. There is the Supply – program group, the Supply – Practitioners group, the Demand group and the QRIS standard group. Everyone was provided with a draft QRIS framework and a copy of feedback that was submitted before the meeting. The whole group then convened to hear reports from the small groups.

QRIS group – Chris Hettinger

The committee discussed the QRIS format and initial draft and listed items that need to be addressed further. The group agreed that there needs to be clarification regarding applying the frame work to centers, family and group care. Discussed how to roll-out the project, including strategic communications, R&R network, testimonials conference speakers, and special group speakers. Recommended moving participation in the CACFP and the Best Curriculum to a one star level as a carrot to pull child care providers cares forward from the licensing level to the next quality level. Discussed accreditation standards and how these would relate to level 2, 3 and 4 (mostly level 4),

but portions of the accreditation begin at a lower level. Will solicit input from experts in specific areas, e.g. health, inclusion, linking to the R&R system, family child care. Need health input, which we are asking Shelly for. More need for an inclusion, which we are asking Child Care Plus. Need more after school input which we are asking for from the Montana after school network. Need R&R input for clarity to make sure this meshes with their process and we talked about a toolkit that would be available after the gateway level that would include optional forms to use, optional methods of tracking of verification of accomplishments. There is a need for standardization. More rollout potential for information to be presented in a positive nature so that people are not taken off guard. Recommend hosting some focus groups. The Bureau will come up with talking points. A cover letter will be issued with the RFP calendar which will be Jamie P.'s first communication to the public at large.

Supply-Practitioner – Jeanette Hall

The group reviewed the criteria for each level, focusing on trainer credentials. Discussed developing a Star Kit with info for each level. Discussed on the job training. Members of the group had questions regarding the 16 hours of on the job training. Where did the 16 hours come from and why? The group agreed that there should be an orientation manual for child care staff.

On the Star level two, merit pay should be available to individual caregivers. And salary should be subsidized so that people can become professionals who can afford to stay in the profession.

Supply-Program – Chauntel Lucier

The work of this group paralleled that of the Supply-Practitioner group. There was a discussion about what QRIS might look like in MT. The group looked at the Star Level systems that are currently in place and how the Montana system can be designed to be comprehensive. There is a need to define the stars from a consumer's perspective. Developing consumer demand for this program will provide an incentive to providers. It was suggested that this be tied in with the School Readiness teams and address workforce shortages.

If Provider Grants are included they could be available at Level 3, the provider grant process could be revamped and possibly become a 5 year plan. There could be two tracts, a 3 year or a 5 year tract, with small increments of money to make it easier to progress. The group looked at the resources at each stage. There could be a resource list, e.g. providing info on small business loans. Part of the process should be to encourage community involvement, look at recruiting appropriate LUP's to be registered and/or licensed.

At Level one, discussed mini grant applications, merit pay for the professional plan and tying the professional plan to the merit pay. Discussed community and family engagement and ways that the R&R's can reach out to the customers. Discussed point systems and how this might be part of the system. The group discussed special and specific incentives for programs who work with the special needs issues.

Chris emphasized that it was important to agree on terminology (e.g. Gateway, One Star, etc.) Jeanette stressed that it will be important for everyone to know what incentives are available.

Demand – Sally Mueller

The group recognized past advertising campaigns and feel that this will be important, but not sufficient in increasing demand for quality child care. There was some discussion of making tax credits for parents, Hank Hudson has been in touch with the Department of Revenue about this.. There are the Beginning steps to creating an early childhood endowment in the state Mary Jane estimates that this will be a reality within five years. We need to work across systems to help communities and families understand on why quality care is so important.

Next step questions:

There was a discussion regarding whether we should continue to work in these small groups. Group consensus was that the groups are working well. Jamie expressed the importance of beginning to develop specifics for the framework.

The next step will be to get groups together to review the next draft on conference calls, with the goal being to develop a “final” draft at the April MECAC meeting to use to begin to gather public input.

January 24, 2008

MECAC standing committee's met in the morning

Committee Reports:

Quality Committee – Ann Tribby (new chairperson)

Libby updated the committee on the practitioner's registry incentive proposal., The committee will rework the incentive proposal and bring it to the career development advisory council in May. Libby introduced Deb Hustos as the Infant/Toddler Early Learning Guidelines coordinator. The goal is to have Infant/Toddler ELGs out by end of 2008. The committee discussed the Touchpoints proposal. **Recommendation: It was recommended by the Quality Committee that the MECAC Council encourage the ECSB to fund a TouchPoints training for two pilot communities, allocating \$55,000. The full Council discussed this proposal and there was consensus.**

The committee heard an update on the RFP calendar and changes to the Best Beginnings Quality programs from Bureau staff. Specialized Training Grants will have several focus areas for proposals and will be out earlier than usual. Provider grants will be phased out, although the current ones will still be funded through their cycles. The money allocated to provider grants in past years will go to the mini grant program and QRIS development. There are changes with the Infant/Toddler Merit Pay. Instead of applying in August before they take the course, everyone who takes the course and completes it successfully will receive a merit pay application and can apply for the award at the end. The intent is that more people will take advantage of the Merit Pay award. Higher Ed & Merit Pay applications will be online and inquiries will be directed to the website. The group discussed the Indiana QRIS system and the evaluation that has been done on that program. The approach to evaluation may be useful as we develop our system.

There was a discussion regarding changing regulations to allow 16 year olds to work in a family or group child care and recognized as a staff member for meeting child/staff ratios. Stephanie will gather background information on this issue. One issue is liability, as background checks can not be done on minors.

Dan McCarthy stated that there is a need to strengthen relationships with schools. Jeanette Hall suggested that we keep the need to establish public school/early childhood partnerships in mind as the Touchpoints proposal go forward. Chris H asked if there were any longevity studies done on the children involved with the TouchPoint system from six years ago. Cindy O said no that it wasn't something they were looking for at that time.

Program Policy – Sheila Mevis was elected chair.

The committee reviewed the CACFP state policy on meal reconciliation and recommends that the policy be changed to reflect the less strict federal regulations. The revised policy will go in to effect March 1st 2008 and the 5 ~~month~~ meal reconciliation should be the month prior to the visit or the last month claimed.

Recommendation: It was recommended by the Program Policy Committee that the CACFP policy should reflect the less restrictive Federal Law 7 CFR226 and not the more restrictive policy error charting at the bottom of the form. **There was a consensus.**

Recommendation: It was recommended by the Program Policy Committee that individuals registered on the Sex & Violent Registry are seen as a perceived threat and that this meets the criteria of good cause for not cooperating with Child Support Enforcement. The Bureau will revise the Good Cause form to reflect these recommendations. **There was a consensus. Move to the department.**

The committee considered a letter from a student who feels that the work hour requirements (working 40 hours a month and attending school full time) is too much. The committee does not recommend changes in the current requirement. Chauntel will write a response to the student.

The committee discussed current state pay rate structures for child care, including the current policy of counting 6 hours as a full day. This issue is tabled for now.

LUP background checks. A subcommittee to review the current system and investigate whether there are ways to streamline the process may be appointed in the future. This issue is tabled.

Recommendation: It is recommended that an automatic closure notice, going to both the provider and the family, be generated at the time of closure by the caseworker. This would go to the CCUB's user group. An update to this policy will need to occur. **There was a consensus.**

Recommendation: It is recommended that state child care policy be changed to reflect the federal government's procedure for calculating income for military families. Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is counted and Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS) is not counted. **There was a consensus**

There was a discussion by the committee regarding part-time care, e.g. Tuesday – Friday. The state cannot pay for days that children are not in attendance, so no change in policy is recommended.

Public Policy-Jeanette Hall, Chair

School Readiness Posters will be printed soon. The committee discussed the importance of recognizing parents as are the child's first teacher. Also discussed parent-staff communication. R&RS should be encouraged to include training on this issue for providers.

Recommendation: Jamie will write a one page paper that defines the goal of QRIS,.

Recommendation: It is recommended that, after the primaries a representative from the early childhood community should talk with the candidates for Superintendent of Public Instruction to advocate for a seamless system that includes early care and education..

Report from the Nominations Committee Ann Tribby was nominated as the next Vice Chair for the Council. She has agreed to take up the position.

There was a recognition and thank you to Cindy O'Dell for serving as the Council Chair through the previous year.

The Chair thanked MEA-MFT for the reception on Wednesday evening.

There was a discussion regarding current members mentoring new members at the April meeting to help them transition to the Council. Council members agreed to do this.

Next meeting April 9th and 10th at the Board of Investments Building, Colonial Drive, Helena